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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 000648

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIFR](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBETAN QINGHAI: FOREIGNERS BANNED, ARMED POLICE
DEPLOYED, EVEN ACCESSIBLE AREAS TENSE

REF: A. OSC JPP20090227969067
[1](#)B. 2008 BEIJING 3966
[1](#)C. 2008 BEIJING 2679
[1](#)D. 2008 BEIJING 1351

Classified By: Classified by Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: All Tibetan areas in Qinghai are closed to foreigners, PolOffs were told by local security officials during a March 10-11 trip to the province, even as enforcement was uneven and confusion reigned over exactly which locations were off-limits. Journalists and other foreigners were turned away from Tongren, a center for Tibetan art and tourist destination, while in Guinan, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, a heavy People's Armed Police (PAP) presence seemed prepared for trouble. Travel restrictions were stricter than during the last half of 2008, resembling those implemented immediately after the March 2008 riots. Local security officials funneled foreigners wishing to visit Qinghai's Tibetan areas to Kumbum Monastery (Ta'er Si), a monastery near the capital Xining that has not experienced major unrest, but even there the atmosphere was tense, with one monk reporting that armed police had been deployed around the monastery. Dalai Lama portraits were nevertheless on display in several parts of the monastery, even in close proximity to security surveillance cameras. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) PolOffs traveled to Qinghai Province March 10-11 in an attempt to visit majority Tibetan areas but were mostly unable to do so due to a ban on travel by foreigners to all Tibetan areas in Qinghai. PolOffs briefly visited the Tibetan town of Guinan (Mangra) before being ordered back to the capital city Xining. There, PolOffs visited Kumbum Monastery (Ta'er Si), a large Tibetan Buddhist monastery and prominent tourist site.

QINGHAI'S TIBETAN AREAS CLOSED, ENFORCEMENT UNEVEN

[1](#)3. (C) All ethnic Tibetan areas in Qinghai Province are currently closed to foreigners, according to local and provincial police in Xining and Guinan. PolOffs nevertheless observed inconsistent implementation of this rule by confused local officials, allowing foreigners (including PolOffs) to travel unimpeded into Tibetan areas, only to be told on arrival they were in violation of the travel restrictions. Bus tickets were still being sold to foreigners at Xining's major bus station for

destinations in Tibetan areas, and a uniformed Public Security Bureau (PSB) officer claimed to PolOffs that foreigner travel to Tibetan areas was not restricted. Asked for clarification as to which areas were currently restricted, provincial PSB officials provided a list to PolOffs of areas purportedly open and closed to foreigners as of April 2005. The document listed several Tibetan areas as "open," including Tongren, Tongde, Guide, Maduo and all of Yushu County, even as those same officials informed PolOffs of the blanket restriction on all Tibetan areas. PSB officials were seeking to direct all foreigners interested in visiting Tibetan areas to visit Kumbum Monastery, a large monastery that has not had major demonstrations, near Xining.

TONGREN OFF-LIMITS, DESPITE BEING ON "OPEN" LIST

¶4. (C) PolOffs attempted to travel from Xining to Tongren (Rebgong in Tibetan), Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, which is home to Longwu Monastery, a major center for Tibetan art and a common tourist destination. PolOffs were told by numerous drivers that the area had been recently closed to foreigners, and the drivers refused to take PolOffs to the area. Foreign journalists in Xining who had attempted to travel to the area reported that the area was closed and that they had been told to return immediately to Xining.

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Provincial PSB officials in Xining told PolOffs that travel to Tongren was closed to foreigners, despite the "open" designation for Tongren on the "official" list of closed and open areas they provided.

CONFUSION AT THE CHECKPOINTS

¶5. (C) PolOffs on March 10 eventually located a driver willing to travel to the majority Tibetan town of Guinan (Mangra), Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. This driver told PolOffs that he had taken several other Westerners to the same area the week before. PolOffs traveled through two police checkpoints on the road to Guinan without being turned back, even though the vehicle was stopped and the driver asked to produce registration and insurance information. Upon arrival in Guinan, however, PolOffs were immediately approached by local police and told that the area was "closed to foreigners." Local PSB officials ordered PolOffs to depart, hastily arranging for transportation for the journey back to Xining. The police officials said the area was closed because they could not guarantee the "safety" of foreigners in their town but declined to provide details on the nature of the supposed threat to public order.

GUINAN TENSE, POLICE READY FOR TROUBLE

¶6. (C) In Guinan, PolOffs observed at least five People's Armed Police (PAP) trucks and more than 30 PAP equipped with riot gear and body armor. The security forces had set up a semi-permanent camp with at least five large tents directly behind the local Communist Party headquarters and main government building. Local police acknowledged to PolOffs that the week of March 10 was a "particularly sensitive period," but declined to provide additional information on the nature of the threat. (Note: Radio Free Asia (ref A) reported that a group of 100 monks had marched on the Guinan

city government building during the Tibetan New Year in February to protest government policies toward Tibetans. Other foreign journalists, however, told PolOffs that they had not been able to independently confirm the report. Separately, a monk resident at Guinan's Lucang Monastery informed PolOff via phone on March 6 that there was "trouble" (mafan) in Guinan. The monk, who frequently visits Beijing, told PolOff it was "inconvenient" (bu fangbian) for him to travel.)

RESTRICTIONS TIGHT DURING SENSITIVE ANNIVERSARIES

¶7. (C) The blanket restriction on travel to Tibetan areas, even if unevenly implemented at the local level, was in contrast to the slight relaxation of access for foreigners to less sensitive areas of Tibetan Qinghai during the last half of 2008 (refs B,C). The situation now more closely resembles that of the period immediately after the March 2008 riots in Lhasa and other Tibetan areas, when travel restrictions were hastily implemented for most Tibetan areas in China (ref C). The heightened restrictions reflect greater official concern over possible protests or other civil disturbances during the one-year anniversary of the widespread riots in Tibetan areas in March 2008 and the 50th anniversary of the 1959 failed Tibetan uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. (Note: The restrictions encountered by PolOffs appear to have been heightened recently, in anticipation of the March anniversaries. Canadian Embassy Political Officer Louis-Martin Aumais told PolOff March 12 that, during a visit to Qinghai the week of February 23 to review Canadian aid projects in the province, Aumais had been able to travel "largely unimpeded" throughout the province, even to ethnic Tibetan areas, with the approval of local Foreign Affairs Office officials.)

KUMBUM MONASTERY TENSE

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¶8. (C) PolOffs visited Kumbum Monastery (Ta'er Si in Mandarin) near Xining, which provincial PSB officials said was the only Tibetan monastery open to foreigners. Even in this tourist-friendly monastery outside of the majority Tibetan areas, however, there were signs of tension. Monks were generally unwilling to engage in conversation with PolOffs, and security surveillance cameras were ubiquitous, including in areas of worship. One older monk, who refused to give his name, rejected PolOff's assertion that the monastery seemed calm. The monk claimed that numerous armed police had "surrounded" the compound beginning on March 10 and that movement by monks was severely restricted. A foreign journalist and photographer who visited later that same day told PolOffs they had been expelled from the monastery by uniformed police officers after attempting to take pictures of monks. Yet, at least two large portraits of the Dalai Lama in his youth were on display in relatively less-visited parts of the monastery, including one in a room adjacent to a worship hall that was monitored by a surveillance camera.

MONKS TOLD TO FULFILL "PATRIOTIC RESPONSIBILITY"

¶9. (C) In a sign that authorities had taken precautions against the possibility of unrest in the Kumbum Monastery, PolOffs noted a "Responsibility

Notice" (zeren shu), dated March 5, that was posted on monastery walls. The notice requires that monks "be patriotic" and attend all "religious activities and various activities organized by the monastery." If monks have "matters to attend to outside," they must "apply for leave at various levels." The document threatened with expulsion any monk who "harms the monastery's image or the interests of the monks."

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